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Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections: election of fourteen members of the Human Rights Council

Note verbale dated 7 October 2013 from the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

The Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Office of the President of the General Assembly and has the honour to refer to the candidature of the United Kingdom for election to the Human Rights Council for the term 2014-2016 at the elections to be held on 12 November 2013, during the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly in New York.

The Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom requests the Office of the President of the General Assembly to have the present note and the annex thereto, entitled "Voluntary pledges and commitments of the United Kingdom on human rights, 2013", circulated as a document of the General Assembly.

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Annex to the note verbale dated 7 October 2013 from the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

Voluntary pledges and commitments of the United Kingdom on human rights, 2013

1. Rights of persons with disabilities

We have set out our approach, based on the principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to enable disabled people to fulfil their potential and play a full role in society.

We are committed to making a living reality of the rights enshrined in the Convention, through our policies and practices that are supported by a substantial body of legislation, including the Equality Act 2010.

2. Children's rights

The United Kingdom protects children through a substantial body of legislation which encompasses the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. These laws create an effective national framework to support positive outcomes for children. We have established Commissioners for Children and Young People across the United Kingdom.

We will further increase our focus on children and their families, through ongoing support and protection so that all children have the best start in life and can fulfil their potential.

3. Women's rights

The United Kingdom is proud to be at the forefront of progressing gender equality domestically through our comprehensive equality legislation and our commitment to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. We have also placed women and girls at the heart of our international development work through the delivery of our "Strategic Vision for Girls and Women".

We pledge to work internationally to increase the number of women in decision-making positions, delay first pregnancy, reduce the level of maternal mortality and increase women's economic well-being and access to justice.

4. Discrimination against minorities

The United Kingdom is committed to tackling all forms of discrimination, including crimes committed against minorities. The United Kingdom has formulated a National Action Plan that will tackle the causes of hate crime. We will continue to promote our established legislation in multilateral forums.

In the United Kingdom, we will challenge attitudes and encourage early intervention, build victim confidence to report and work with partners to improve the operational response to hate crimes, including dealing with offenders robustly.

We will promote good practice on tackling hate crime and improving the evidence base, so that resources can be focused where they are needed.

5. Freedom of expression

The United Kingdom is a strong supporter of freedom of expression, including on the Internet, and promotes this as an essential element of our work on democracy and human rights internationally. We support the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and supported the first cross-regional resolution on freedom of expression on the Internet at the Human Rights Council. We will speak out in favour of freedom of expression and encourage countries to uphold their international obligations in line with United Nations standards. In particular, we will condemn any violence associated with the expression of views. In this context, we look for those responsible for violent acts to be brought to justice.

6. Freedom of religion or belief

The protection and promotion of the right to freedom of religion or belief is one of the United Kingdom's key human rights priorities as it is a fundamental right which underpins many other human rights. Where freedom of religion is under threat, normally other freedoms are restricted too.

We are committed to working more effectively with international partners and with civil society and faith leaders to promote awareness of the need for greater acceptance and understanding between followers of different faiths and in support of religious freedom for people of all religions or none.

7. Business and human rights

We played a key role in the development and endorsement of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. We held an international conference on the Guiding Principles with the cooperation and involvement of the Working Group on business and human rights. We are one of the first Governments working to develop a national strategy, which will communicate the Government's expectation that United Kingdom companies will respect human rights wherever they operate. The United Kingdom dedicated £750,000 in 2012 to overseas project work to promote awareness and implementation of the Guiding Principles. We will promote widespread international uptake up of the Guiding Principles and support the Working Group.

8. Preventing sexual violence in conflict

We remain committed to the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and associated resolutions on women and peace and security, and accordingly have developed a National Action Plan. In 2012, we contributed £1 million to support the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

We have launched a Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative, through which we intend to strengthen international efforts and coordination on this issue in conflict and post-conflict situations. We will work closely with United Nations and Group of Eight partners as we aim to tackle impunity and support survivors.

9. Preventing violence against women and girls

The United Kingdom is significantly scaling up our programme work, as well as building the global evidence base on what works to tackle violence against women and girls. The United Kingdom currently provides £13.25 million to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). The United Kingdom has ongoing programmes addressing violence against women and girls in 20 developing countries, and we work in an additional 22 countries, through UN-Women and civil society.

We pledge to work on research and innovation that will focus on the areas of prevention, domestic violence and violence against women and girls in conflict and humanitarian settings.

10. Preventing torture

We work to combat torture wherever it exists: the United Kingdom was one of the first States to ratify and implement the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

We will encourage ratification of the Convention and the Optional Protocol thereto, and will assist other Governments to prohibit and prevent torture.

11. Tackling contemporary slavery

We are committed to tackling modern forms of slavery. The United Kingdom has ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings and signed up to the European Union Directive on human trafficking to demonstrate our commitment to tackle this horrific crime.

We have taken action at the national and global levels and will continue to encourage other Governments and the international community to stop modern-day slavery and trafficking in human beings.

12. Working effectively within the international human rights system

We are committed to a strong, effective international human rights system. We believe the independent United Nations human rights treaty monitoring body system is essential to the protection of human rights globally.

We will continue to nominate candidates for membership of the treaty monitoring bodies after an open and transparent selection process to determine expertise. We will cooperate with special procedures of the Human Rights Council and will take steps to improve our response rate to their communications. We will support the independence and the work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and her Office.

13. Making the universal periodic review a success

We are committed to the success of the universal periodic review mechanism. The value of the universal periodic review lies in its universal nature, constructive spirit and complementarity with other procedures, and we are determined to uphold these fundamental principles.

We will work to ensure that the universal periodic review process embeds fully, and commit to submitting no more than two clear, focused and implementable recommendations to each United Nations Member State. We consider the universal periodic review to be an ongoing process, and in this spirit commit to a midterm report on progress against all the recommendations we received. We also pledge to assist others by sharing our experiences and offering advice and support where requested.

14. Tackling human rights crises

We believe the Human Rights Council should respond to situations of human rights concern, wherever and whenever they occur. We will consider Human Rights Council responses according to the severity of the situation on the ground, in an impartial, non-selective manner, and will consider other factors — such as whether there has been a call for action by United Nations bodies, whether the situation is already under constructive consideration by the Human Rights Council, and whether there is cooperation with the United Nations human rights mechanisms.

We pledge to tackle human rights situations and crises, through either support and dialogue or greater scrutiny, in accordance with their specific requirements.

15. Mainstreaming human rights throughout the United Nations

The Human Rights Council has a unique role within the United Nations system. But, as agreed by United Nations Members, the pillars of the United Nations — development, peace and security, and human rights — are interlinked and mutually reinforcing.

We are committed to promoting human rights within the development and peace and security pillars of the United Nations. This includes ensuring that the Security Council has access to the necessary human rights information on which to base its decisions.